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ABSTRACT

Many rural school districts are contemplating joint administrative agreements at the superintendent and central staff level. An Illinois superintendent who participated as a joint administrator of two districts points out the advantages and disadvantages of such an arrangement. The potential budget savings often allow the hiring of a top administrator and the computerization of the central office. In some districts joint arrangements can prevent the reduction of course offerings and the elimination of smaller-sized classes while allowing increases of part-time staff to full-time and the hiring of specialty teachers. Shared purchasing and cooperative sharing of equipment and facilities also result in major budget savings. Another important factor is the spirit of cooperation fostered by having an administrator in common between two school districts. Some of the problems of joint administration for the superintendent are as follows: dealing with two separate boards of education and twice the number of board meetings; extra travel time between the two districts; and doubled attendance at extracurricular functions. The following suggestions are offered to districts contemplating such an arrangement: (1) do not have a superintendent serve two dissimilar districts; (2) have a single administrative office outside of the district school buildings; and (3) delegate responsibility to principals and central office staff. Joint administrative agreements provide a viable solution to some of the major problems facing smaller districts in Illinois. (MD)

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Advantages and Disadvantages of a "Joint Administrative Agreement"

by

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Advantages and Disadvantages of a
"Joint Administrative Agreement"

In these financially bleak days, many rural school districts are contemplating "Joint Administrative Agreements" at the superintendent and central staff level.

For two and a half years, I served as superintendent of Braceville Elementary #75 and Gardner-South Wilmington High School #73. Our particular "Joint Administrative Agreement" involved two superintendents administrating three districts. After the resignation of the Gardner High School superintendent in the spring of 1982, I became the superintendent of the high school district and one of the elementary feeder districts. The superintendent of an adjoining elementary feeder district served as the high school principal and superintendent of one of the other feeder elementary districts. Our time was split between the high school district and our elementary districts.

After participating in this "Joint Administrative Agreement" for two and a half years, I could see a number of advantages and disadvantages with such a system. I'd like to discuss my observations and offer some suggestions to superintendents and districts contemplating "Joint Administrative Agreements".

The most obvious advantage is the potential monetary savings that can be obtained by two districts sharing the salary and fringe benefits of a superintendent and possibly the central office staff. In relation to this benefit, the services of a top flight administrator can be acquired by a higher shared salary than a single district could afford. A computerized central office with trained personnel is also possible with two districts which might not otherwise be within either's budget.

In smaller rural school districts, shared staffing among districts is an alternative to reducing course offerings and eliminating smaller sized classes. This was a major benefit for both of my districts and enabled part-time staff to be enlarged to full-time and specialty teachers to be acquired for use by multiple districts.

Shared purchasing among the districts was a major cost saver. This also allowed for cooperative sharing of each district's equipment and facilities, which allowed greater flexibility and reduced expenditures. By combining orders on needed items, significant monetary savings could be realized.

One of the most important factors engendered by "Joint Administrative Agreements" is the spirit of cooperation that is fostered by having a superintendent in common. Communities, school boards, and citizens, pull together in a shared

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course of cooperation. This was encouraged by the formation of a "Joint Informational Board" made up of all members of the cooperating boards of education and attended by citizens of the cooperating school districts. Common problems were shared and discussed in an air of problem solving for each district. This was a critical and important factor in the success of our particular "Joint Administrative Agreement".

Although I would not encourage it, the sharing of principals is possible as a cost-saving measure. My experience has shown there is a need for a single principal to be in charge of one school, while it is entirely feasible for a single superintendent to effectively administrate two school districts.

The so called "two hat theory" should be discussed so that districts are aware of SBE requirements for administrators with multiple duties. Document Number One states that "an administrator, superintendent or principal, may serve in two professional capacities provided that full-time equivalency results in a maximum of one full-time positon". This is important to remember for smaller districts in which the superintendent also serves as the principal. In such districts, they could, therefore, not hold an additional administrative position in another district.

Many districts are considering consolidation in order to offset declining assessed valuations and enrollments. The use of a "Joint Administrative Agreement" can be utilized as either an alternative or an intermediate step for consolidation of districts. I feel that in either case it provides greater flexibility in handling the problems of smaller rural school districts.

Some of the problems that I encountered as a superintendent of two districts included: dealing with two separate boards of education with their individual identities, plus double the number of board meeting preparations for each meeting.

Another particular problem was the assimilation of the important numbers and formulas that are vital for the business aspects of a school district, such as levies, budgets, state aid, etc. Each district has their own financial history, and future projections which must be formulated in order to successfully run the district.

Travelling between districts with the accompanying loss of time seemed to be an unavoidable problem. The effective scheduling of my time between districts and offices became critical, in order that I could be where I needed to be in a timely manner. Also unavoidable was the problem of not being able to be in both places at all times to handle routine and emergency business for each district.

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Attendance at extra curricular functions was doubled. It was impossible to attend all functions for both districts, so I had to "prioritize and equalize" my attendance at these activities. This schedule had to be coordinated with my building principals and the office staff of each district.

Having participated in a "Joint Administrative Agreement", I have some suggestions for superintendents and districts contemplating such an agreement. Do not attempt to have a superintendent serve dissimilar districts. For example, a superintendent should administrate two unit districts or two elementary districts and not one of each. I would not suggest the combining of two high school districts. High School districts require an inordinate amount of after school activities and seem to be more complicated to administrate effectively.

While I had two offices, one in each district, I feel a single administrative office is preferable. All the records and correspondence can be kept separate by an efficient office staff in a single location. This alleviates the problem of time lost in travel and insures your availability in the office when needed. An office that could be utilized outside of either school building would be preferable. A rented or purchased facility, such as a small house or a suite in an office complex, would be an excellent workplace and in this way the superintendent would not be specifically identified with either district simply by the location of his office and staff.

It is essential that superintendents delegate more of their responsibilities to principals or central office staff. This requires trust and confidence in these key personnel so the superintendent may have the time necessary to administrate efficiently in both districts.

Effective communication between the cooperating boards was a critical factor in the success of the agreement. A "Joint Informational Board" was set up for discussion purposes only, but it provided a necessary vehicle for the superintendent to communicate with both boards simultaneously. This remained perhaps the single most important factor in our successful "Joint Administrative Agreement".

Superintendents and boards of education should be aware of the difficulties encountered with "Joint Administrative Agreements", but based upon my experience, it provides a viable solution to some of the major problems facing smaller districts in Illinois. It is important that boards and superintendents plan carefully in advance and be aware of the needs in cooperating at the superintendent level. While it is a relatively new concept in public school administration, I feel it is a possibility that deserves to be investigated in the current plight of smaller rural districts.

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